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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the report of the California Commission on the Reform of Intermediate and Secondary Education and the proposed Reform of Intermediate and Secondary Education (RISE) bill that resulted from that report. In particular, the authors focus on whether the commission's report and the bill constitute genuine educational reform in terms of Spady's criteria for educational reform. According to Spady's definition, educational reform must include (1) changes in instructional content, (2) changes in educational governance, (3) changes in the functions of schooling, (4) changes in the structure and allocation of educational resources, and (5) changes in access to and the outcomes of schooling. The authors conclude that the RISE report and bill meet many of these reform criteria, but that their ultimate success will depend on the creation of strong regulations and guidelines for implementation, the availability of a great deal of new money to finance implementation, and the support of the citizens of California. (JG)

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SOME CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING STATEWIDE REFORM: CAN CALIFORNIA "RISE" TO THE CHALLENGE?

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In July, 1974, California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Wilson Riles, formally began the process of reform of California's intermediate and secondary schools. He charged the Commission on the Reform of Intermediate and Secondary Education (RISE), a Commission of 35 citizens picked by and advisory to him, to:

1. Envision an educational system which could respond continually to changing needs of our society in the next quarter century;
2. Identify those skills and competencies that individuals will need to survive and function effectively during the next twenty-five years;
3. Chart ways to make schools more effective, more enjoyable, more challenging, and more conducive to learning;
4. Identify the goals and the resultant changes needed to accomplish the desired results statewide.

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On the face of it, the charge seems bold enough to produce an environment of discussion from which reform could be recommended. In addition, Riles made one other set of statements to encourage a report calling for reform. He told Commission members that they were not to consider whether their suggestions were possible in economic or political terms; that they were not to worry about implementation strategies; and, finally, that he was pledged to and had the capability of acting on the recommendations once received. These statements had the effect of freeing the Commission to make those recommendations thought best.

As an aside, two events acted, perhaps, to dampen the scope of reform called for in the report. The first was that Riles appointed to the Commission some representatives of educational constituent groups. The second was that the Commission members agreed to bind themselves to a 3/4 positive vote in order to include a recommendation in the report.

After about 45 days of open deliberation spread over a year, the Commission members submitted their final report in July, 1975. Riles thanked Commission members and disbanded the Commission.

Between March, 1975 and now Riles has been developing implementation strategies. He constituted State Department of Education task forces to help prepare legislation and regulations. Members of the task forces are some of his top educational and political staff. In October, 1975 one of his top staff appeared before the Assembly Education Committee to

outline implementation steps. In January and February of 1976 the State Board of Education approved, in principle, implementation and authorized legislation. In March, 1976, Senator Dunlap introduced Senate Bill 1737, the "Reform of Intermediate and Secondary Education Act." Between August, 1975 and the present State Department of Education task force members have been meeting with constituent groups throughout California. Six new task forces of SEA staff and educators have been created and charged with helping to develop guidelines and regulations.

All of this activity suggests that Riles has taken seriously his pledge to implement reform and that requisite bureaucratic and political commitments have been made.

The question before us is "Yes, but is it reform?" We plan to examine the question with reference to the Commission report and to the Bill, using criteria posited earlier by Spady.* These criteria are:

1. changes in the content of instruction;
2. changes in the distribution of power and decision-making among the actors and constituencies inside and outside the school;
3. changes in the way the basic functions of schooling are defined and relate to each other;

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*Spady, William G., "Competency Based Education as a Framework for Analyzing School Reform," at the Sociology of Education Association, January 31-February 2, 1975 at Asilomar, California.

4. changes in the actual structure and allocation of resources of all kinds in schooling; and,
5. changes in the patterns of access to and outcomes of schooling.

In addition to these posited consequences, reform, as different from change or innovation, must have a wide scope.

A. Content

The Commission Report and the subsequent legislation address this criterion in somewhat different ways, although each begins with the same assumption; namely that each student is an individual and is entitled to learn and develop in an individualized manner. The Report and the legislation than catalog a series of intellectual, interpersonal and career skills which each student should have opportunity to attain. The series is neither new nor dramatic, being rather a restatement of other sets developed by other groups during the last years.

Two recommendations are worth mentioning however. The first is that both the report and the legislation place more emphasis on career and interpersonal skills necessary for adult life in an uncertain future than might be found in formal statements from other reports or in state curriculum guidelines. The second is that the Report recommends and the legislation mandates that the State Department of Education develop minimum standards of competence in the use of English

language and mathematics, that schools be required to adopt them and that students achieve them.

As an aside, the Report and the legislation address the question of the relationship between content in high schools and admission to university. Neither is very strong on the question; the Bill mandates the State Board of Education to "Recommend to public and private institutions of higher education modifications in admission criteria which are consistent with this reform effort."

Thus, the Report and the legislation provide for the possibility that new content will be introduced but neither specifies in detail what that content might be.

B. Governance Changes

On this point the legislation is much stronger than the Report. Where the Report stated that ways should be found to increase the legitimate roles in governance of a wider range of people, the legislation establishes mechanisms for doing so. The first strategy is intended to shift the basis of accountability by education to the legislature. Accountability to the legislature in California has been one of process accountability. The State Education Code is very long and detailed, specifying what is prohibited and what is required. The requirements and prohibitions are written in process terms. The Bill attempts to shift the base of accountability toward outcomes by: 1) Mandating state-wide proficiency in English and mathematics; 2) Establishing evaluation criteria which are stated in terms of outcomes of

the effort; and 3) Providing that the State Board of Education may excuse a local school district from provisions of the State Education Code if so doing "is necessary or beneficial to the successful implementation of a school site reform plan."

The second strategy is intended to shift the important governance decisions to as close to the school site as possible. District level administrators and Boards of Trustees are charged with more facilitative and policy than control responsibilities. These units are to develop planning mechanisms, establish district-wide achievement standards for graduation, encourage direct and continuous involvement of a wide range of actors, revise administrative procedures to insure more flexible allocation mechanisms, and provide for staff development.

The third, and most important, strategy is intended to widen substantially the base of participation and to legitimate the school site as the primary governance unit. The legislation creates school councils "composed of, but not limited to, the principal and representatives of teachers, other school staff, students and parents. Members of the council shall be representative of the populations they serve."

These councils are given the main responsibility for planning and implementing whatever reforms they believe necessary. They must develop, submit and implement school site reform plans. "Ongoing responsibilities of each council include participation in:

(a) Assessment of the school's capacity to respond to the individual educational needs of learners;

(b) Development and specification of school goals and objectives;

(c) Ongoing review of the school site plan and its implementation, and an evaluation of its effectiveness;

(d) Development of criteria for use in the recruitment and selection of new staff as vacancies occur or additional positions are created;

(e) Periodic review of the school's allocation of resources;

(f) Ongoing renewal of school site reform efforts."

If adopted, the school council has the potential of becoming the primary governance body.

C. Change in the Function of Schooling

The Report and the legislation attack this problem in similar ways. Spady* has stated that schools have five functions:

1. Instruction;
2. Socialization;
3. Custody-control;
4. Evaluation-certification;
5. Selection

How these functions are defined and the relative importance placed on each in a school determines the social and intellectual

*Ibid.

life of the place. The reforms of RISE do much to alter the definitions and the patterns of relationships among these functions.

1 INSTRUCTION

The Report and the legislation drive instruction toward a competence base, away from the confines of the school house, and into new modalities with respect to sequence, times, places and methods. The modal curriculum is no longer assumed to be an age-graded sequence of discipline-based classes held for 50 minutes each day for 36 weeks on a school campus incorporating teacher lectures, student recitations and capped by a teacher-designed written examination. What is being proposed is that almost anything goes as long as a student is helped to achieve competence.

2. EVALUATION-CERTIFICATION

Historically a major component of evaluation and subsequent certification has been based on "acceptable student behavior" as defined by educators. Certification has been based on getting good grades, which in turn has been based on a varying combination of intellectual and interpersonal behavior. By mandating competence-based instruction and standards, evaluation and certification are proposed to be based on the achievement of academic and other skills, specified beforehand and subject to demonstration in a variety of ways under a variety of conditions. Students now will have a much wider array of ways of showing success. Finally,

educators are charged with developing closer links between instruction and evaluation and with designing mechanisms to assure at least minimum success for all students.

3. CUSTODY-CONTROL

This function, some have claimed, is the primary mission of the school. RISE does not speak directly to the phenomenon. However, two assumptions of the Report and the legislation has potential for profound impact. The first assumption is that: "Each student should be recognized and accepted as the primary client to be served by the school." A corollary assumption is that as each student matures he should be given "greater responsibility for deciding what, where, when and how to learn."

Taken together these two assumptions, and the related legislative language, dramatically shift the ground rules for custody and control. Those functions have developed because the primary clients of schools have been parents and educators. Custody and control are things which the schools have done to students on some other groups behalf. If the student is to become the primary client those functions should diminish quickly and along with them a very large percentage of school rules and policies.

4. SOCIALIZATION

RISE redefines the socialization function by encouraging students to become independent, rather than dependent; by giving them responsibility for decision-making and by giving them practice in making decisions; by placing

educators in the roles of facilitators and advisors rather than in the roles of impeders and judges; and by giving students increasingly adult roles with respect to interpersonal relationships.

In addition, the suggested reforms give students a much wider range of adult models and arenas in which to observe and practice. By legitimating a wide variety of off-campus activities, the reforms will place students with adults, other than parents or teachers, in work arenas, leisure arenas, and political arenas. Students no longer will have to rely on one another and parents or parent surrogates for definitions of value. Students will learn to become adults rather than high school students.

5. SELECTION

Selection is a phenomenon in which life-changes are differentially allocated, in so far as the symbols awarded by educators are perceived by others as significant. These symbols have been, in general, numbers, letters and short phrases. The Report and the legislation shift the criteria and procedures of judgement such that new symbols may have to be developed. Such symbols as GPA or such phrases as "needs to learn to be more cooperative" may lose their meaning, to be replaced by sets of statements about what a student does well. In that case, the school's role of selecting for life chances may be diminished.

D. Change in Resources

The Report and the legislation make important statements about resource structures and allocation patterns. In addition to new dollars, the Bill provides for a variety of new resources. In no particular order these are listed.

1. Choice

The legislation provides for a much wider range of choice for students. These choices are related to learning, to methods of demonstrating competence, to the sequencing of the student's time commitment to the process, and to the resources available to him.

2. New Roles

The legislation provides that each student can expect that some adult (citizen, teacher, etc.) will be provided for him in the role of advisor. The advisor is charged with helping the student plan and carry out a program designed to meet his needs.

3. Other Adults

The Bill declares that students are to be given opportunities to learn from any person thought to be capable of teaching the student what is necessary in light of his individualized learning plan.

4. More Competent Educators

The Bill mandates on-going staff development to promote constructive staff relations, to assist individuals in understanding and assuming the new roles and responsibilities

which may be required in meeting the goals and objectives of the school site reform plan, and to increase professional skills."

The legislation also revises the bases of resource allocation. Mechanically, provision is made to develop alternatives to Average Daily Attendance (ADA) as the mechanism of allocation. Instead, new money is allocated on the basis of "students in program." Second, school districts must show maintenance of effort and inter-school comparability of expenditure, insuring that reform dollars will be spent to enhance program.

Most important the legislation mandates that allocation procedures be related to the achievement of objectives. First, each student will have an individualized learning plan. Second, schools are required to "identify school resources and methods by which they can be effectively coordinated to achieve the goals and objectives of school site reform." Third, continued receipt of funds will depend on evaluation against three criteria:

1. Data reflecting the nature and degree of institutional change resulting from school site reform efforts;
2. Fiscal expenditure data reflecting the allocation of all resources to and within school sites;
3. Student performance information.

The scope and order of these evaluative criteria suggest the extent to which the effort is an attempt to consolidate

and focus fiscal and human resources on an educational program defined in relationship to individual student needs. The potential of dramatically different expenditure patterns is there.

E. Schooling Access and Outcomes

We are hesitant to say much about this criterion. It is, after all, the ultimate criterion. The RISE effort is intended to impact both of these phenomena by opening up access to those who are now being pushed out or encouraged out and by broadening and deepening the definition of outcome. The empirical evidence is yet to be collected about the extent to which the stated intention of the Act,

> "The Legislature finds and declares that the current system of intermediate and secondary education in California is in need of reform and renewal to insure that it can respond in a timely and effective manner to the educational, personal, and career needs of every student."

We began by asking, "Yes, but it it reform?" Our analysis suggests that a good many of the pieces are there; a comprehensive Report, tightly-drawn legislation, bureaucratic and political commitment, and some sophisticated strategies of implementation and evaluation.

However, there are unanswered questions. While these are almost entirely political in nature, they are critical if reform is to be realized. First among them is the extent to

which guidelines and regulations will be written in ways that insure implementation of new models of education based on different assumptions. If the relative importance of the five functions cannot be changed, then reform will have failed. To change the relationships among and definitions of function will require strong guidelines and willingness by officials to make hard decisions.

Second is the issue of cost. Between 1976 and 1983 total cost is estimated at almost ~~1~~ .45 billion dollars in new money.

Third, and finally, is the issue of whether or not the citizens of California want to do what is being proposed.

Each of these issues will be subject to resolution in the next 10 years.